

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-10 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-14

USIA-04 COME-00 EB-03 LAB-01 SIL-01 AGR-03 INT-01

FEA-01 DRC-01 /064 W

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R 100810Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4419

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FOLNG SENT NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY AND MADRAS FROM CALCUTTA
DATED 09 OCTOBER.

QUOTE: CALCUTTA 2151

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB ETRN PINT IN

SUBJ: STRIKES IN EASTERN INDIA: COAL, DOCK,TEA AND JUTE

REF: NEW DELHI 12840

1. SUMMARY. IN THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS, TOKEN STRIKES IN
ANTICIPATION OF MORE SERIOUS ONES LATER HAVE BEEN OBSERVED
IN EACH OF THE MAJOR EASTERN INDIAN INDUSTRIES--COAL, JUTE AND
TEA. THE CALCUTTA DOCK WORKERS ARE ALSO INVOLVED ON A SOON-
TO-BE-ENDED GO-SLOW OVER A BONUS DISPUTE WHICH THE GOI
HAS DECIDED NOT TO GRANT. PROGNOSIS: INCREASED LABOR UNREST
IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS DESPITE THE FACT THAT MOST OF THE LABOR
LEADERS WE TALK WITH ARE CONVINCED THAT THE GOI WILL BREAK
THEM. THEY (INCLUDING INTUC LEADERS) SEEM TO FEEL THAT IF THEY
DON'T CARRY ON WITH "MILITANT" LINE THEY WILL LOSE THEIR
FOLLOWING TO LEFT PARTIES PARTICULARLY THE CPI(M)'S CITU.
END SUMMARY.

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2. COAL: ON OCT. 6 THE FIRST OF TWO TOKEN STRIKES (THE SECOND WILL BE FOR 48 HOURS ON OCT. 28-29) WAS OBSERVED FOR 24-HOURS IN THE COAL BELT WHICH STRADDLES THE BIHAR/WEST BENGAL BORDER. IT WAS APPARENTLY MORE OR LESS COMPLETE ON THE BIHAR SIDE (THE DHANBAD AREA) WHERE KANTI MEHTA'S INDIAN NATIONAL MINE WORKERS FEDERATION (INTUC) IS STILL VERY STRONG. MEHTA'S UNION JOINTLY CALLED THE TOKEN STRIKE WITH THE CPI'S AITUC UNION (WHICH IS NOT VERY STRONG). THE CPI(M)'S CITU-AFFILIATED UNION SEPARATELY SUPPORTED THE STRIKE. ASIDE FROM THE ECONOMIC ISSUES INVOLVED (WHICH ARE CONSIDERABLE), THE POLITICAL TUSSLE BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND CPI(M) UNIONS IS INTENSE. ON THE WEST BENGAL SIDE, THE STRIKE WAS LESS SUCCESSFUL. HERE THE CONGRESS-AFFILIATED UNIONS ARE SEVERAL. MEHTA'S IS LESS IMPORTANT WHILE VARIOUS WEST BENGAL CONGRESS YOUTH LEADERS (ESPECIALLY MINISTER OF STATE FOR LABOR PRADEEP BHATTACHARYYA AND WBPCG GENERAL SECRETARY SAUGATA ROY) HAVE DEVELOPED THEIR OWN FOLLOWINGS. NEITHER, FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, SUPPORTED THE STRIKE CALL. THE HIND MAZDOOR SABHA (HMS)--SOCIALIST PARTY AFFILIATED UNIONS OPPOSED THE STRIKE, BUT THEY ARE NOT CONSIDERED IMPORTANT IN EITHER STATE. MEANWHILE NEGOTIATIONS ARE BEING HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE REGIONAL LABOR COMMISSIONER, DHANBAD AND WE SEE THIS ONE-DAY STRIKE AND THE NEXT PROJECTED ONE AS PART OF THE UNIONS' NEGOTIATING STRATEGY.

3. DOCK: THE IMPORTANT HMS-AFFILIATED AND CITU-AFFILIATED DOCK (NOT PORT) WORKERS UNIONS HAVE BEEN ON A GO-SLOW FOR THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS. THEY HAVE BEEN JOINED BY THE MUCH LESS IMPORTANT AFFILIATES OF AITUC, HMP, AND THE TWO FACTIONS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY'S LABOR FRONT, UTUC (JATIN CHAKRAVARTY) AND UTUC (LENIN SARANI LED BY FATICK GHOSH). THEY ARE ASKING FOR A REPEAT OF LAST YEAR'S 11.86 PERCENT BONUS PAYMENT BY THE STEVEDORING FIRMS (WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE UNIONS, HAVE MADE AT LEAST AS MUCH PROFIT AS LAST YEAR AND THEREFORE "SHOULD" PAY AT THAT RATE). THE UNIONS CLAIM THE STEVEDORING FIRMS HAVE INDICATED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO PAY BUT THAT THE GOI (IN THE FORM OF UNION DEPUTY MINISTER FOR SHIPPING PRONOB MUKHERJEE) HAS REFUSED TO SANCTION THIS ARRANGEMENT. ACCORDING TO HMS WEST BENGAL SECRETARY, BIMAL BANERJEE, WHO CAME TO THE CONSULATE YESTERDAY ON OTHER BUSINESS, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MUKHERJEE HAS ASKED THE UNIONS TO AGREE TO GET THE SAME AMOUNT OF EXTRA MONEY THROUGH OVERTIME PAYMENTS WHICH WE WILL GUARANTEE BUT TO GIVE IN ON THE BONUS ISSUE (WHICH WOULD BE PRECEDENT-SETTING). THE UNIONS, BANERJEE THOUGHT, HAD NO OPTION BUT TO ACCEPT BUT THEY SEEM TO BE WAPNUING ANOTHER FEW DAYS BEFORE ABANDONING THE BONUS ISSUE.

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ACTION NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-10 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-14

USIA-04 COME-00 EB-03 LAB-01 SIL-01 AGR-03 INT-01

FEA-01 DRC-01 /064 W

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4420

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4. TEA: THE GORKHA LEAGUE (THE NEPALI ETHNIC POLITICAL PARTY OF DARJEELING DISTRICT) THE THE CPI(M) AFFILIATED UNIONS IN THE TEA GARDENS OF NORTH WEST BENGAL, ALONG WITH THE RSP AND SOCIALIST UNITY CENTER (SUC) LABOR FRONTS OBSERVED A 24-HOUR STRIKE ON OCT. 3. IT WAS DESCRIBED AS "LARGELY" SUCCESSFUL BY TEA TRADE CIRCLES AND, INTERESTINGLY, SOME OF THE CONGRESS-AFFILIATED UNIONS IN THE AREA JOINED THE STRIKE, EVEN THOUGH NEITHER INTUC NOR NLCC (THE MAJOR CONGRESS DISSIDENT UNION IN WEST BENGAL) DID SO.

5. JUTE: ON SEPT. 24, THE INTUC (KALI MUKHERJEE AND SISIR GANGULY), CITU AND AITUC OBSERVED A ONE-DAY STRIKE TO PRESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COST-OF-LIVING INCREASE, WAGE PROTECTION IN VIEW OF THE POWER RATIONING SYSTEM WHICH ENTAILS A FIVE-DAY WEEK, FAIR PRICE SHOPS IN THE JUTE MILLS, ETC. THIS APPEARS TO BE THE OPENING-SHOT TO SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS, BUT THE INTERESTING THING TO NOTE IS THE INTUC PARTICIPATION. IN FACT, KALI MUKHERJEE, CONGRESS RAJYA SABHA MEMBER (AND FORMER WEST BENGAL INTUC PRESIDENT), HAS BEEN TAKING THE LEADING PUBLIC ROLE ON THE UNION'S BEHALF.

6. COMMENT: IT IS PRE-PUJA SEASON AND IN WEST BENGAL THAT IS THE TRADITIONAL TIME FOR BONUS AND WAGE DEMANDS. WHETHER AND
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HOW SERIOUS ANY ONE OF COMBINATION OF THESE PROJECTED STRIKES
MAY BE WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO SAY. WE CERTAINLY AGREE
WITH YOUR JUDGEMENT (REFTEL) THAT THE COAL STRIKE IS THE
POTENTIALLY MOST DEMAGING TO THE ECONOMY. IN ADDITION, IN
TERMS OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS FOR THE NATION, THE
TEA AND JUTE INDUSTRIES ARE CRUCIAL AND PERHAPS EVEN MORE
HIGHLY POLITICIZED THAN THE COAL AND DOCK SECTORS. THE
GOVERNMENT'S POSITION WHICH APPEARS TO BE DETERMINEDLY
TOUGH, IS WELL-REFLECTED BY ITS INVOCATION OF THE
DEFENSE OF INDIA RULES (DIR) WHICH PROHIBITS ANY STRIKE IN
THE PORT AND DOCK OF CALCUTTA FOR A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS,
I.E., UP TO APRIL 8, 1975.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: RAW MATERIALS, COAL, LABOR DISPUTES, GENERAL STRIKES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974NEWDE13558
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740288-0689
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741056/aaaabvus.tel
Line Count: 188
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: NEW DELHI 12840
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16-Aug-2002 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <06 MAR 2003 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STRIKES IN EASTERN INDIA: COAL, DOCK,TEA AND JUTE
TAGS: ELAB, ETRN, PINT, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005